MODIFICATIONS OF THE MIND

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THE THEOSOPHICAL PUBLISHING HOUSE
Adyar Madras 20 India

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Each man is a continuing body of consciousness with a coat of matter which in a simple view is his physical body. I call it a body of consciousness because it has its contents in a particular form which varies for each individual, and this is a continuing body, being modified every instant partially, but never wholly until it is dissolved by death.

This entity of consciousness, obviously, is conscious at different levels, not only the physical level, but also emotionally, mentally and perhaps in other ways. Physically, the characteristic of consciousness is sentience—the registering of sensations which takes place through the different sense organs. I am conscious I am seated on a piece of wood, that

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Talk given at the Australian Convention at Broken Bay in April 1965. It is reproduced in the form in which it was given.

I am amidst trees, that I am surrounded by people. All these objects as they affect me I know through different sensations, which are all forms of knowing or consciousness. You are conscious that the ground is hard, that something else is soft, that the sky is blue, the trees are green and yellow, and so on. Now, you will see, if you shut out every intruding thought, that consciousness consists in being conscious—you just know, that is all, what there is to be known. This sounds a terrible truism, but if we focus attention on that truth, we may be able to learn much from it.

As I said, I am conscious of all the things around me, of the various faces, their expressions, and this consciousness of what is before me requires no effort. I need not exert my will to become conscious. It is like opening my eyes, then I see. When I am just conscious there is no activity of thought, no play of attraction or repulsion. The word to use with regard to that state is "awareness". Certain things exist as facts, I am aware of them. This condition is purely negative, that is, if there is no disturbance by the activity

of thought, no interjections of different sorts, such as " I want this, I don't want that," and so forth.

Mirror-Like

This negativity is like a mirror in which the objects present are reflected. You hold up the mirror—that is the mirror of one's own perception, of awareness—and whatever the objects may be, they are reflected in it. The mirror does not have to make up its mind to reflect, it has no choice. If you place a big enough mirror, the whole scene will be reflected in it.

This negativity of consciousness is pure sensitiveness. The word negative is often used in a depreciative sense: the positive is the good, the helpful, the negative is the bad, the obstructive. But I am using the word negativity in a scientific sense. It is not inertness, it is not vacancy or vagueness, but it is sensitiveness, and that is the essential nature of consciousness.

I compared awareness to a mirror and said the mirror has no choice. But we have choice, or the consciousness has choice. I can pay

attention or not pay attention. I can be at the front, I can withdraw. I can be conscious, I can sink into unconsciousness. So there is the play of will obviously to that extent. I can open my eyes, I can close them. What decides this choice is will or wish.

Ordinarily, what we call will contains factors of desire. " It is my will," we say; we are obstinate, insistent, we assert ourselves. Why do we do all that? Because there is behind it something we want, something we desire, or do not like. There are almost always elements of desire in what we choose to call will. The factor of will is very different from the nature of sensitivity. When you use your will, the will is positive, it acts, it decides, whereas awareness is negative, it is purely receptive. That is an important difference. In fact, will and sensitiveness are complementary to each other.

The Factor of Will

In the make-up of the human being there is a nature of sensitiveness which is passive, receptive, but records everything in a most extraordinary manner, and there is the will

which goes out, which determines, which acts each instant in a particular manner, and produces a change in the condition of consciousness. This will enters, as I shall presently show, into every activity of consciousness. When I say activity, I am distinguishing it from the mere receptivity which is passive, which is mirror-like. In fact, the sensitiveness and will are complementary, as are the circle and the radius. I am introducing this simile because you will see presently it is illuminative. The circle is an expanse, whatever may be its size. Consciousness is also an expanse, it covers a field, large or small. At this moment, if I am sufficiently awake, my consciousness can take in all that is before it, exactly as though it is a photographic plate, which reflects everything, including the minutest objects, with absolute objectivity. But when we speak of the radius, it is just a single line which is directed to a certain point on the circumference. Of course, if the circle can make itself smaller or larger according to requirements, this radius, though directed to only one point within the plane of the changing circle at a particular moment,

can cover all points by changing its direction.

There is a little spot of brown grass over there, my attention is directed to it. The relationship of my consciousness to that particular spot makes a radius. The attention is pointed to that bit and excludes everything else. It is going in one direction. But the attention can shift from that direction to another. It can point to one thing within the circle at a certain moment. The next moment it can shift to another point, and from there to another. It is as though the radius constitutes direction, and the direction is moved under the action of will.

When I am aware of something spread out in space, this scene for instance—the sky, the trees, the water, the hills, the ground, all of us here—we can regard the whole as a kind of map, as something spread out. I am aware that there is the whole of it, and I am also aware that there are different parts, so many blades of grass, so many fallen leaves, the chairs, people seated, and so forth. So awareness includes the consciousness that there is the whole and that there are the various parts.

When I am aware in that manner, I can will to turn my attention to a particular part, an object, and not include other objects in my awareness. Consciousness is a very manageable thing. You can expand it, you can contract it. You can exclude, you can include. I can concentrate on one point, say one particular face in this audience, or just one color. In doing so it is the factor of will which operates. I can move the attention from that spot to another, and that is also by will. It is as though the radius I spoke of is a ray of light, it falls on one spot first and then on another. The nature of the action of will is to cause a movement, a change.

The darting of the ray, which is an activity in the field of consciousness, can be extremely quick and cover very many points. It is something like what takes place in television. You think you are looking at a picture. The fact of the matter is that the points in that picture are lighted up by a line of light, but this line moves with such extraordinary quickness, that you are unable to take in the intervals of time and therefore the whole thing appears as a

picture. The same thing happens in the processes of thought.

Process of Thinking

When you examine the process of thinking, which is a positive activity, it is not negative sensitivity, the will is acting all the time. The activity consists of a series of steps. Each step has to be initiated by an impulse, however quick and easy it may be and what is impulse in the physical field is will or the force of inclination in the field of consciousness. In the process of thinking, although you may not be aware of that fact, there is this will acting all the time, shifting from one image to another. It acts amongst the images in the consciousness, in the memory. If there were no memory, you cannot think, because there is no field on which this radius, this line of light, can play.

Consciousness is such an extraordinary thing. In its essential nature it is like a photographic negative, receptive of impressions. The modern astronomer perceives many things by means of his negative, which is so sensitive that it records objects in space too minute for our

eyes. The consciousness retains the impressions which it receives, in a certain aspect of it indefinitely. You receive various impressions in the course of your life, they are all recorded in the consciousness. You may say, " don't we forget? " It is very well known that the brain, the sub-conscious mind, records many things which you do not notice, which you do not perceive, but it is possible, by applying a certain stimulus, to evoke the image just as when you play a gramophone record the old songs are reproduced. The images, the impressions which have been formed, which have remained below the level of the conscious mind, can be brought up from the recesses of the brain by a purely mechanical process. But I am not talking of the brain, I am talking of consciousness.

These impressions, when they are formed on the brain, can continue only for a length of time because brain is matter and whatever is formed on the basis of matter, must come to an end. But consciousness is not of the nature of matter, as we know it, and there is a certain aspect of it where what is recorded in the greatest minuteness is retained

indefinitely. That is what is called Ākāsha. The impressions of the past constitute the memory of the individual.

Shifting Images Seemingly

When we say memory, it is not merely memory of yesterday, the previous year, and so forth. It is also the memory of what was impressed the previous second. Even that is in the shadow of memory. The pencil of light moves in the field of these images in the thinking process. It acts as though it shifts these images into different positions relatively to one another. I say " as though "; because I do not think it really shifts the images, but it shifts itself and therefore it appears as though the images are shifted, but that is going into a further subtlety.

This is a vast subject, so intricate, so very, very subtle; all we can do is to try to understand. Our understanding of these matters is very imperfect, and there must be an enormous amount more to know.

When the images in the field of memory are shifted about, there arise different relationships between them, and the consciousness in

its aspect of sensitivity notes these relationships. For instance, the distance between the two objects is so much; placed next to another line it appears shorter, and so on. This is really the activity of thought, reasoning, logic and inference.

Different elements are present in the consciousness, different sensations, different colors, different experiences, different forms. All these are marshalled in various ways, as if they are moved about, and then they are constituted into images, figures, structures, edifices, and this is what we call imagination or image-making. The whole activity is extraordinary. This pencil of light moves and turns upon itself in such a manner that by its own activity it seems to be moving the whole field, all the images in it, into new relationships, into new edifices. This activity takes place with lightning speed in our ordinary thinking. Of course the speed of lightning can be measured, but this cannot be measured, it can be instantaneous. Though we are unaware of it, this activity is taking place in us all the time.

Will is ordinarily regarded as part of the mind but I am making a distinction, which

I think is very necessary, between sensitiveness, will and feelings which are also regarded as part of the mind. Feeling, when it is feeling the nature of something, as when you feel with your hand the texture of a cloth, is a form of sensitiveness—it is the negative aspect of consciousness. But we use the word " feeling " also to include personal reactions. Thus it has different meanings. I feel the pleasantness of the air, feel the clarity of the atmosphere, and also feel a certain repulsion or a reaction of fear. When you feel the nature of a thing, you are aware of something which exists.

Complications of Attachment

Now we come to certain complications that arise due to another factor, which is attachment or desire. Consciousness literally implies experiencing whatever is, whatever exists. It thus registers the facts of pleasure and pain. I touch something hot, there is a feeling of pain. I taste something nice, there is a feeling of pleasure. These are sensations, forms of knowing but instead of merely registering them, the consciousness gets attached to certain

sensations and repels others. This is of course well known to us. Repulsion is also a kind of fixation which is attachment, so we might call the whole phenomenon, including every form of repulsion, as the phenomenon of attachment.

When we say attached, what is attached to what? It is the attachment of consciousness in its inherently colorless or crystalline nature to sensation which is an experience of something particular. Sugar is sweet. The consciousness which in itself is colorless is attached to that sensation which is sweet, but that sensation is also a form of consciousness. So, that which is in itself formless gets attached to something particular which has form. At any rate it looks so. We do not see these things clearly enough, first because we do not pay attention; secondly, our minds are not swift enough and free enough to enter into these various nuances of changes in the consciousness and transactions between our minds and the outside world.

The attachment is automatic. You have a tin of nuts, you put one into your mouth and bite it, you get a pleasant sensation. Without

your knowing it—you may be absorbed in a book—the consciousness gets attached to that sensation. From the attachment there arises desire which motivates the will to put your fingers into that tin and place another nut in your mouth. So it goes on, and by the time you have finished half your book, you may have finished half the nuts. The action is automatic when you do not pay attention to it, but when once your attention is called to it, you begin to think: "Should I continue eating? Perhaps I should stop." It breaks the continuity.

This automatism continues so long as there is unawareness. So long as we are unaware of ourselves, we will continue to act as though it is a machine which is acting and not a free intelligence. What really happens is, one attachment is formed, then another, it is joined on to the first by association, then there is a third, and finally a whole system of attachments established in our nature. This system is like a machine; it is as though various rods are connected with one another, so that when you move one rod, there is a motion on the part of every other rod in the

system. The centre of this system is the "self". There has to be a centre of movement, a pivot on which the whole thing turns, a point at which each force impinges and new directions of movement are caused.

The formula that sums up its varying activities is "I want". Want is the action springing from attachment; "I" is the subject that is the ego or the self (in the ordinary sense). It is only as long as there is the wanting there is the "I". An attachment must have two ends. The farther end is the object which is pursued, which provides the sensation; this end is the "I", the seemingly permanent centre. The formula works in varying forms: "I like food", "I like flattery", "I like importance", and so many other things. Perhaps "like" is not the right word; "want" is better, because you may like a thing, register its agreeableness, yet not ask for it.

There is attachment in our lives, in some degree to every experience that has embedded itself. Every attachment is like a thread in the field of consciousness, thrown out to a particular point, a particular image, a particular

sensation. When this thread, filament let us call it, is galvanized, when a certain current runs through it, then there is a pull, and that pull is desire. Attachment is the passive form of desire, and there are ever so many threads in one's nature which are pulled in different directions. I said that even repulsion may be regarded as a form of attachment, for you are bound to the thing you repel, to the person whom you hate, to the image which you fear. Whether it is hate or fear, greed, ambition or desire, the thread, the tension, is there.

These pulls are of varying intensity and often not noticed; they act in devious ways. We are so identified with this condition that we are unable to realize what is taking place. When we are identified with a thing, we will be unconscious of it. I sit in this chair. If this chair were perfectly comfortable and I fitted beautifully into it, I would find that after a time I would be entirely oblivious of its existence. Whatever you are completely identified with or adjusted to is not an object of knowledge; you, the subject, do not pay attention to it.

A Distorted Field

When these threads so tangled pull in diverse ways, the whole field of consciousness, the continuum, gets distorted, crumpled, made altogether irregular. That is what happens to everyone of us in some degree and that is what we are, although we may not realize it. When it is thrown out of shape by the tensions, stresses and strains, it is no longer a truthful mirror. I called it at first a mirror in which things are reflected as they are, that is what it is meant to be, but when it is no longer truthful, it shows distorted pictures. You may say, " No, I see this tree all right, there is no distortion in my consciousness ". Yes, in regard to the tree; there is that much of truthfulness in us. If we fail to see the tree as a tree and imagine it to be a wave in the ocean, then of course we cannot live in this world. We see things as they are but only to that extent. But the mirror shows distorted pictures of the characters and motives of people, of situations, of everything that takes place in the field of consciousness, though not of things of the physical world which are inexorably objective and cannot be played with

with impunity. It is no longer a clean, photographic negative. So many impressions have rained upon it. It is of course meant to receive impressions, but they have not only rained upon it but have got stuck there; due to the attaching process, it is now overlaid by a thick shadow of what it is in its pure essential nature.

We do not know the pure essential nature of consciousness, in which we may be said to be rooted, because we have become so changed. You can have clear flowing water, but if the water gets mixed up with a lot of mud and such things, and finally gets frozen, and if this frozen block gets fissured at various points, we would see lumps of hard ice in various shapes mixed with foreign matter; it is no longer the clear glassy water which is flowing beautifully, smooth and level.

How to Unbecome

If we have become something different from what we were originally and what we could have continued to be, can all this be undone? How can we regain that nature in which there can be the feeling of utmost freedom with its inherent sensitivity? It can be undone only

through an understanding of the whole condition and process—through self-knowledge, awareness, comprehension. Awareness is registering what takes place in its objectivity. Comprehension includes perceiving the meaning of all that takes place. Self-knowledge is the turning of attention to the processes which constitute the self, and knowing the nature of that constituted self. We cannot know what freedom means till then, nor the extraordinary sensitivity that goes with it.

The fact is (I talk of course hesitantly) that consciousness is sensitivity itself. When we say the consciousness is sensitive, there is a certain redundance in those words. The modified consciousness as we find it in ourselves can have a certain degree of sensitivity. Of this consciousness it is permissible to say it is less sensitive, more sensitive, sensitive to this, not to that. But when we think of consciousness in its essential nature, the very substance of it, then it is itself sensitiveness, there is no distinction to be made between the two. In its own nature, which, as I said, is formless, and therefore not limited by space, and capable of omnipresence, it is sensitiveness

to everything that exists and takes place in this extraordinary universe. When I say everything that exists, I do not merely mean atoms, particles, concrete objects, but also the whole realm of thought, feeling, significance and beauty. There can be sensitivity to feelings, to expressions on the face of something or somebody, to proportion, to harmony which can exist in innumerable forms, to the whole universe in its subjective and objective aspects. Objective means that which you see outside yourself; subjective means that which you can experience only within yourself, in the nature of consciousness itself—the spiritual and the psychic. There is the possibility of knowing all that, responding to all that, experiencing all that. Although we do not know this for ourselves, yet it is an illuminative idea, logical and satisfying to one's sense of fitness and completeness.

I used the words spiritual and psychic; we know what is spiritual only by experiencing it. We can know it not as something apart from our consciousness, but as one with it. Is what we call Spirit as distinguished from Matter, a nature, or is it a power or is it a

principle? Is it the beauty that is experienced in those motions of consciousness, infinite as these may be, which can take place without modifying its inherent nature? Perhaps it is all these, we do not know. Because it is so subjective, it has to be a matter of discovery by each one individually; for us it is the unknown. It has been spoken of in various terms. We may regard consciousness and also life as arising from the relationship between Spirit and Matter, in which case we must regard consciousness as approximating to Spirit but as conditioned, defined and limited by Matter. Matter is the means of expression. Spirit is something the nature or action of which is being expressed through appropriate forms. The experience of that nature or action is also truth. In the ultimate, consciousness and Spirit are one, because consciousness is then identified with Spirit, not with matter. When we say Consciousness and Spirit are one, the image that is evoked is of unity, but it may be also an infinite, unknown to us. We are using terms with meanings, into which we can only peer " as in a glass darkly ".

PRINTED IN INDIA

At the Vasanta Press, The Theosophical Society,
Adyar, Madras 20.